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ABSTRACT

Seventeen small and mid-sized employers from Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative sites addressed the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and promoting frontline workers. Employers shared collaboration experiences with Jobs Initiatives sites to develop effective, efficient strategies to prepare and support low-income residents. Firms relied on frontline employees to ensure they thrived; all required literacy and job readiness far beyond what frontline workforce generally possess. Employers reported low work attendance and recognized these causes of retention problems: transportation, day care, and the relationship between wages and eligibility for public benefits. Many employers experienced problems recruiting workers with higher levels of skill and would have advanced frontline workers, but many workers lacked skills. Tuition reimbursement remained unused due to upfront costs, child care, transportation, and study time. Solutions to improve retention were a workshop on positive attendance, mentor/buddy system for foreign workers, and collaboration with Jobs Initiative intermediaries to develop work-readiness components. With collaboration of Jobs Initiative intermediaries, firm-based programs addressed advancement through improvements in tuition reimbursement policies, release time, reverse referral, internal career ladders, and reinvigorated apprenticeship programs. The Keynote Address (Steve Gunderson) described a workforce crisis consisting of the serious and widening gap between skills employers need to compete in the global economy and skills of the workforce. (YLB)

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

The Employer's Voice: Frontline Workers and Workforce Development

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On March 13-14, 2003, 17 employers from the Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative sites—Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, Seattle and St. Louis—assembled in Washington, DC, to address the challenges of recruiting, retaining, and promoting frontline workers. Organized by Jobs for the Future, the conference provided a forum for a voice rarely heard inside the beltway: small and mid-sized employers committed to entrepreneurial success and the success of frontline workers.

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Coming from a wide variety of industries—manufacturing, financial services, call centers, hospitality/gaming, fast food, health care, and business services—these men and women came to Washington because they shared the vision underlying the Jobs Initiative: America's businesses with good entry-level jobs can and will hire low-income residents from the nation's inner cities if intermediaries—such as the Jobs Initiative sites—place a priority on meeting the workforce needs of America's businesses. Each of the 17 gave their own time for the opportunity to collectively speak to an audience of key congressional committee staff, U.S. Department of Labor representatives, and representatives from national policy and employer organizations: the policymakers and opinion leaders responsible for the nation's workforce development policies. Also in attendance were the directors for several Jobs Initiative sites.

Seated at a horseshoe-shaped table, the employers drew on their direct experience with their own firms and workforces. At the top of their agenda were the economic survival issues confronting businesses dependent upon the quality of a frontline workforce. They all spoke of continuing challenges recruiting and retaining qualified entry-level workers, even in these slower economic times. Yet all took heart from their experiences with the Jobs Initiative sites, which collaborate with employers to develop effective, efficient strategies to prepare and support low-income residents.

The following is a composite of the employers' voices, as they shared their experiences around hiring low-wage workers from Jobs Initiative sites and engaged in open dialogue with federal policymakers on how the public workforce system can be improved.

The Challenge

FRONTLINE WORKERS:

> *"Our previous owner invested $1 million in equipment but had no workers capable of using the machines."*
> —Kenneth Hurzeler, Pfeil Milwaukee Brush Company

> *"There is a disconnect [between our needs and] what they didn't learn at home, at school or in other work experience."*
> —Larry Crane, Northrup Grumman Ship Systems

> *"Sorry, this conversation is not about high school, but why do we graduate these kids?"*
> —Mike O'Connell, AD Tape & Label

Frontline workers represent 60 to 90 percent of the workforce for the firms represented at "The Employer's Voice." These firms rely on frontline employees to ensure that their establishments thrive. While their industries draw upon a variety of workplace skills, all require literacy and job readiness far beyond what today's frontline workforce generally possess.

The ideal employee, one employer stated, is 18 to 24 years old and drug-free. Even though these employers invest heavily in recruiting employees—"There is no place we are not looking!"—the reality of who they find is available is "female, with one or

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two children, some high school and not enough work experience."

There was evident frustration with what young people know and can do when they finish high school. "We are dancing around the big elephant here. We are looking at 18- to 20-year-olds with third- and fourth-grade skills." Welfare reform, with its "'work first edict,' brings employees into the workplace that do not have work skills or a work ethic." One employer stated, "If you can't read a ruler, you are useless." Increasingly, these employers believed, the pool of available frontline workers is composed of "non-traditional workers," with little or no work experience, few skills, and often significant needs to improve their English language skills.

Several employers had participated in local school-to-career initiatives and appreciated the diversity of students prepared to go on to college. But, as one employer noted, "They are not going into my industry [construction]." A number of heads nodded in agreement when one employer complained that public schools should do a better job informing students that many of them could make good livings in industries like construction without going to college: the schools "should address this."

Retention and Turnover

"There is a new challenge in having a diverse workforce."
— Debbie Bird, SAFECO Insurance Company

"The folks who design these transportation systems need a new mindset."
— Henrietta Mack, HMS Host Corporation

Many employers noted that the incidence of "no call, no show" is extremely high when frontline workers are poor and trying to raise families. One firm, which had recently instituted a labor/management committee, reported that "attendance became 90 percent of the labor/management discussion." Another employer reported 100 percent turnover in the firm's fast food operation in one year.

Many employers recognized that one cause of their retention problems was the sheer challenge employees face simply getting to work. Increasingly, frontline workers live in cities while jobs move out to the suburbs. Public transportation connecting the two locations is spotty or non-existent, and new workers' personal transportation options are often limited.

Day care is also an important factor in retention, especially for employers who operate shifts outside traditional hours. New employees normally begin on the night shift, the hardest time to secure day care. The problem is exacerbated when children are in single-parent homes. Moreover, to secure subsidized day care, employees must use certified providers and maintain a certain number of hours per week. Add the transportation barriers to the equation and problems result: employees don't put in enough hours, they lose day care, and then the job.

Even more disconcerting is the relationship between wages and eligibility for the public benefits that can help working people make ends meet and avert the financial difficulties that can lead workers to lose or leave their jobs. As one employer said, "We face the whole issue of public benefits vs. work benefits, where earning too much money takes away child care, Section 8, and a host of benefits, so people decide that work isn't worth it."

Raising wages might appear to be an effective retention strategy, but it is not a complete solution. According to another employer, "When people reach a certain wage level, they quit because they become ineligible for child care; to stay with us they have to turn down a raise." Another participant spoke ruefully of being aware that the firm paid "a little bit too much but not enough to survive."

The Jobs Initiative

Launched in 1995, the Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative provides funding and support for community-based initiatives in five cities in order to help young, low-income workers find meaningful jobs and to identify national employment and training models. For more information, see: www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative.

Policy Implications of Employer Views on Workforce Development

Allocate more resources for skills upgrading.

- Invest additional resources in, and create incentives for, incumbent worker training.
- Invest additional resources in, and create incentives for, pre-employment training for entry level workers.
- Include skills certification in training for entry-level workers.

Improve the effectiveness of the public workforce system.

- Encourage One-Stops to perform like any other employee sourcing service.
- Have One-Stops utilize business-like customer management, with rapid response and a clear point of contact.
- Improve the match between job seekers and the jobs employers are seeking to fill.

Market the public workforce system to employers more effectively.

- Conduct employer service fairs, inclucing all relevant public partners.
- Provide regular orientations for employers about Workforce Investment Boards and One-Stops.
- Use a consistent marketing message for employers.

Support intermediaries that use a dual-customer approach: they serve employers by also serving low-income job seekers.

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Advancement to Higher-Skill Jobs

> *"The reality is that people can't advance without advanced skills."*
>
> — Taylor Ward, Allegheny Child Care Academy

> *"Lots of people could benefit from on-the-job training, and employers would use it if there were no strings attached."*
>
> — Tom Jones, Pinnacle Entertainment, Inc.

Many of the employers at the forum were experiencing problems recruiting workers with higher levels of skill and would have been happy to advance their frontline workers. But many frontline workers were "locked in," as one employer said, "by the specialized skills required." Often, low literacy skills prevent frontline workers from benefiting from traditional training programs, which require the ability to test at or near the eighth-grade level in reading and, sometimes, math. Flexible, customized, work-based training strategies are best, but, as employers pointed out, their cost can be beyond the reach of many businesses, and training removes frontline workers from work tasks.

Many participating firms offer tuition reimbursement as a way to encourage their employees to acquire the skills needed to advance. However, this benefit often goes unused. When asked why, several employers agreed that workers' upfront costs—employees pay tuition and purchase supplies with their own funds and are only reimbursed later—can be prohibitive for people with low incomes. Added to that are the costs and hassle of securing and paying for child care, finding and paying for transportation to classes, and carving out study time. As one employer concluded, "Skill training can be an impossible choice to make." Another suggested "trying to bring training into the community because the ability to attend becomes an issue."

Other factors as well can multiply workers' barriers to advancement. For example, an employer reports that his requirement for frontline workers to have a "clean driver's license" for promotion to higher jobs hampers their advancement within the industry.

Stereotypes are also a common barrier to advancement. As one employer observed, "There is a disconnect because of the gap between frontline workers and supervisors, and neither sees the potential of the other. I want to be frank and candid: supervisors do not see frontline workers as potential leaders or managers, and workers lack self esteem."

"With all that TANF does," another continued, "it makes people have no self esteem. If they had self esteem, it wouldn't be such a disconnect."

Solutions

> *"We can't wait for national solutions or look to Capitol Hill to make this work."*
>
> — Henrietta Mack, HMS Host Corporation

> *"We can't do it alone. Intermediaries are essential."*
>
> — Leonard Toenjes, Associated General Contractors

The employers attended the forum at the invitation of their Jobs Initiative partners. All were committed to finding "win-win" solutions—solutions that helped their businesses *and* their employees thrive. And they had ideas to share and innovations to recommend.

Retention

As one employer said, "When workers improve their attendance, they keep their jobs." How can that improvement be achieved?

"We collaborated with a provider, Workplace Change, and developed *Positive Attendance*, a four-hour workshop that provided solutions for workers." The workshop reduced attendance problems by 50 percent. Another company, with 26 languages represented in its workforce, developed a mentor/buddy system that paired new employees with incumbent workers speaking the same language. Yet another created work-based ESOL programs for its "multicultural diverse workforce that includes African Americans, Lao, Hmong, and Russians."

A large firm collaborated with its Jobs Initiative intermediary to develop a customized training/internship program. The firm took advantage of the collaboration to modify the site's training curriculum significantly, adding work-readiness components to smooth the transition to employment. Internships at the firm immediately followed the intensive training program, where new employees had an opportunity to "learn the ropes" *and* get help from Jobs Initiative trainers before becoming full-time employees.

Video: Advancing Workers: Achieving Business Success

Advancing Workers: Achieving Business Success, a video from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, shows how the Jobs Initiative and other intermediary workforce efforts work with employers to help low-wage employees succeed and advance in their jobs. This documentary shows bottom-line benefits to employers, including reduced turnover costs, higher worker morale, and increased productivity. The 15-minute video includes compelling interviews with employers, workforce practitioners, and employees, as well as footage from Jobs Initiative sites. The program shows how changing demographics and a decline in worker education are increasing demands for a successful workforce. To view the video, go to: www.aecf.org/initiatives/jobsinitiative/aecf/jump.html.

Some employers have made use of a unique Jobs Initiative product, *Managing to Work it Out*, a training curriculum for supervisors. Another firm has benefited from *Twenty First Century Success Principles*, a pre-employment training program developed by the New Orleans Jobs Initiative. This program helps people with little work experience get ready for employment.

Other useful ideas for improving retention rates came from Annie E. Casey Foundation Cultural Competence committee member Karyn Trader-Leigh. The foundation and the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies supported Trader-Leigh's development of a series of tools for a multicultural workforce. The tools are designed for the three major players in workforce development: workers who will benefit from enhanced soft skills development, employers who require new skills to manage an increasingly diverse workforce, and intermediaries who broker between the two. (For more information, see www.catalyst4change.com.)

Advancement

Employers demonstrated a major reason the Jobs Initiative values their partnership when they addressed the topic of advancement. People in the audience were surprised to hear how many employers had initiated, often with the collaboration of Jobs Initiative intermediaries, firm-based programs to help frontline workers advance.

Emphasizing that they "are committed to promoting from within" and "investing in their people," employers talked about not only familiar topics, like skill training, but also less-familiar innovations that sounded quite promising.

For example, several employers recommended improvements in tuition reimbursement policies. Some employers have eliminated the barrier of "up-front" payments by paying themselves for textbooks and others course materials and having "the community college send the tuition bill to us." Another employer described its partnership with a community college, which provides "on-site, real time, comprehensive training that responds to individual workplace needs and worker skills assessment to develop customized training."

One small company has instituted innovative strategies that allow frontline workers to take "controlled release time" to explore advancement opportunities not available within the firm. Another has set up a "reverse referral" system by working with other companies to advance and then "backfill" employees across an informal industry network. Another offers Internet courses and 23 on-site paid training hours per year.

Several companies have benefited from strengthening or instituting internal career ladders. These firms develop the skills of their frontline staff, creating candidates qualified for higher-skill vacancies within the same company. One firm offers paid incentives for workers to acquire certification in new skills, and in some instances provided the payments up front. At least one employer offers paid release time to acquire advanced skills.

Another employer has tackled head-on the difficult problem of managers/supervisors who assume that frontline workers can't perform higher level work. As the manager of a trained information technology frontline workforce, he has developed strategies to persuade his management colleagues that frontline workers can actually do the job.

Finally, several firms spoke warmly about innovative labor/management approaches they'd developed with their Jobs Initiative intermediary to advance frontline workers. These include reinvigorated apprenticeship programs tailored to meet the needs of frontline workers, as well as labor-management oversight committees that negotiate all such innovations in advance, a tactic that has sharply increased the support of long-time employees for their new, "non-traditional" co-workers. ■

Tom Dowd, Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration, U.S. Department of Labor

At the forum, Tom Dowd detailed the U.S. Department of Labor's commitment to employers as the catalyst to success in the publicly funded workforce development system. He built a description of early successes and the challenges ahead to underscore the need to align education and employment (the public workforce system), along with economic development. This, he noted, was needed in order to move the dual-customer public system and the economy forward. According to Dowd, "There are mutual interests." He reiterated the Department of Labor's principle that the "demand-driven" system cannot succeed without business input. "Workforce development is economic policy, not social policy."

Jane Oates, Senior Education Advisor to Senator Edward M. Kennedy

To introduce a discussion of the public policy implications of employers' comments, Jane Oates delivered a provocative assessment of the challenges facing reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act. According to Oates, a key reauthorization issue will be to strike a balance between, one the one hand, national, state and local policies and, on the other hand, the needs of communities and their business constituencies. WIA, Oates went on, is a "systems building bill." Given that, the challenge would be to structure legislation that incorporates uniformity, standards, consistency, and flexibility.

Keynote Address by Steve Gunderson

Steve Gunderson, former Congressman from Wisconsin, set the stage for The Employer's Voice, opening the forum with a call to action. He described a workforce crisis—and charged that neither politicians nor business leaders recognize its severity. The crisis is the serious, and widening, gap between the skills that U.S. employers need to compete in our global economy and the skills possessed by America's workforce.

I want to tell you why I got involved with workforce training. I represented rural, western Wisconsin, first in our state legislature, then in the U.S. Congress. The transitions in rural America are just as real and just as painful as the transitions we see today in urban American, and I literally didn't know how to serve my agricultural constituency without being able to talk to them about what they would do when the farm was no longer there. My field director back home was the best man I've ever met who could go out to the farm, sit at the coffee table with Mom and Dad, and when they were finished with coffee, take Dad out for a walk on the farm, put his arm around his shoulders, and tell him that trying to fight the foreclosure by the Farmers Home Administration made no sense. It was time for him to think about the future. That's why I feel so passionately about the issue of job training and workforce investment and about the future of our country. I came to understand that whether you're liberal or conservative, Republican or Democratic, if you don't care about the future, you shouldn't be in public office.

We have a crisis going on in this country and it's not the deficit. We have a crisis going on in this country, and it's not education. We have a crisis going on in this country, and it's not Iraq or Korea. There is a crisis going on about the future of this country because of the huge, emerging collision of demographics and workforce skills, and unless we're willing to understand and respond to this crisis, nothing else will matter in the next 15 to 20 years.

A week ago, at the National Association of Workforce Boards, I said, "I've got two goals. Goal number one is to help engage you, the business community, in what we are trying to do. And second, to educate the policymakers at the national level about the crisis that is going on." Those are my two goals. Here are my two problems. Number one, neither the business community nor the policymakers are paying any attention. Second, they are not paying any attention because they don't think there is a problem.

"We are in the business of creating a two-class society such as America has never imagined. The United States ranks tenth among modern industrial countries in terms of literacy and education, and the gap is increasing."

In fairness to them, if you want to understand Congress in the year 2003, you need to understand the concept of attention deficit disorder, and I don't mean that in a critical manner. I was on Capitol Hill yesterday, meeting with one of the more enlightened Republican members of the House, who shares our understanding and our concerns about this. He came back from a mandatory budget conference and says, "It's just awful around here." He started going on about all the problems they were facing, one after another. In that kind of environment, there was no way I could say, "By the way, can we talk about what's going to happen in the next seven to twenty years in this country in the workforce?" He would have looked at me and said, "You've totally lost it."

What I try to do when I get the opportunity to share some thoughts with people like you is to try to put it all in a little bit of context and little bit of perspective. I try to do some research about where we are statistically and what all this means. I thought you would enjoy knowing that we are now in the 106th week and the 24th month since the economy peaked in March of 2001. We're looking at 17 percent teenage unemployment in this country. Over 10 percent unemployment in the black community. Almost 8 percent unemployment in the Hispanic community.

We are looking not only at temporary unemployment, but, more importantly, we are facing a permanent consolidation and restructuring of the American workplace, with jobs being eliminated permanently. Listen to some of these numbers. November of last year we lost 104,000 permanent jobs. In December we lost 115,000 permanent jobs; last month, we lost 308,000 permanent jobs. The only reason why we didn't lose jobs in January is because the traditional December hiring for the holiday season didn't happen. But over three of the last four months we have seen America eliminate for good over a million jobs. And nobody in the American political system is talking about it.

Since March of 2001, we have witnessed over 236,000 jobs lost in the construction industry. Since April of that year, we have seen over 186,000 jobs disappear in the communications industry. In transportation in the

last two years, we have lost over 500,000 permanent jobs, mainly in the airline industry but more broadly in the whole industry. We are looking at an average at 48,000 manufacturing jobs eliminated in this country on a monthly basis.

Guess what, that's the good news. Last month, we lost 53,000 manufacturing jobs, 5,000 more than the average over the last two years. Service employment fell in February by 86,000 jobs. In the retail trades, it fell by almost 100,000 jobs, and nobody in America is talking about what is going on.

If that's today, what about tomorrow? Even under close to normal economic times, the labor force normally grows by 1.6 percent a year and has almost every year in the last 50 years. We are now looking at about 0.5–0.6 percent growth per year. And the workforce is becoming older. Today, workers over 55 make up 13 percent of the total workforce. By the year 2020, they'll compose over 20 percent of the workforce, and that's assuming their 401(k)'s recover. If they don't, it's going to be worse.

The workforce is becoming more diverse. White non-Hispanics will decrease from 73 percent of the workforce today to just over 50 percent before mid-century. Hispanics will increase to almost one-quarter of the workforce. Blacks will grow to 14 percent of the workforce, and Asians will grow to between 10 and 15 percent.

If those numbers seem distant for you, let me bring it into the next five to seven years. White non-Hispanics will fall to less than 65 percent of our American workforce. Hispanics will climb to 16 percent. Blacks will grow to 13 percent and Asians to almost 8 percent.

In addition to that diversity, we are bringing into this economy young people at the end of the baby boom. Almost three and a half million young people, 16 to 19 years of age, will enter the workforce by 2010. Between now and 2010, 41 million people will enter the American workforce.

That's under normal circumstances. We are, however, facing a major work shortage based on trying to keep up with the growth of the population. By 2028, there will be 90 million more jobs than there are workers, and at least 40 percent of the people available to fill these jobs will be minorities.

The worker gap is just part of the challenge. The bigger challenge is the skills gap. Those of you who are employers know this well. Employers estimate that 39 percent of their current workforce and 26 percent of their new hires have basic skill deficiencies. Basic not advanced. Forty-two percent of the new job growth over the next seven years will require some level of college. Sixty-five percent of all American employment now requires specific skills. Seventy-five percent of the American workforce today will need training to simply keep their jobs. Not even to advance—just to hold on to the job they have today.

As we talk about the reauthorization not only about the Workforce Investment Act but also the Higher Education Act, we are looking at the fact that in 1980 a college degree produced the salary 50 percent higher than the worker who entered the workforce without that college degree. Today the person with that college degree will have earnings 100 percent higher than the person who enters the workforce without. We are, ladies and gentlemen, in the business of creating a two-class society such as America has never imagined. The United States ranks tenth among modern industrial countries in terms of literacy and education, and the gap is increasing.

We not only have a worker shortage and a skill shortage in America. What we have is a system that is not prepared to provide solutions. Here's my sermon to you in the business community, and I know it's unfair to speak to the choir, but you're the only ones in the church. The fact is, the business community in this country has chosen since the passage of *No Child Left Behind* to pick up their bags and go home and say they no longer need to be engaged in the advancement of public policy around human resources, education, and training. If you don't believe me, look at the fact that the largest, historic voice for business in terms of training and workforce investment, the National Alliance of Business, is no longer here. The challenge is to get the National Association of Manufacturers and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce to look beyond tax cuts and economic and trade policy to deal with the concept of having a qualified, competent, trained, skilled workforce in America.

Consider the reality. As of 2000, 7 percent or the white students, 11 percent of the black students, and 38 percent of the Hispanic students did not complete high school. And that's with today's "inadequate standards." Impose new standards, and God bless America we need to do it, those 7, 11, and 38 percent digits are going to double in front of us in a short period of time. Let's figure out how to retain and mentor those most challenged by the new standards.

Reality. Remember I told you about the wage gap? As of today, 84 percent of the white workers in America, 91 percent of the black workers, and 97 percent of the Hispanic workers enter the American workforce without a college degree. We already trail three other nations in the percent of our population graduating from college,

with many other nations poised to overtake us in the next five years.

And don't let anybody tell you that everybody's going to college today. Yes, we're recruiting them, and we're taking their money, but the college dropout rate is embarrassing. Entrance numbers mean nothing. Are people getting certificates or degrees so they can go into the workforce with proven skills? It's not happening.

Despite all this, business investment in training has fallen almost 20 percent in the last 10 years. When we were working on the Workforce Investment Act, we said, "We don't know how much public investment in job training we need because every corporation on America is doing its own training to fit its own needs." Guess what? They were, but productivity, competition, etc., have changed all that. It's not happening. Moreover, 53 percent of the American workers today are employed by small businesses. They don't have the ability to provide training. They simply don't have the capital to do that.

What does all this mean? It means that nobody is talking about the most significant question in this country in the next seven to twenty years. It is the collision between demographics, on the one hand, and workforce skills, on the other. And it will not only challenge our ability to be globally competitive economically, it will challenge our ability to provide any kind of hope for improved quality of life in this country, any kind of ability for political, cultural, and social stability in the American system.

This is truly a nation at risk again, 20 years after the challenge that we had before, and nobody knows about it. Our policy and our business communities are not aware of it. And because we are dealing with huge deficits at the federal and state levels, the federal government has decided its only response is to punt to the states. We're saying to people, "We're going to give you the money regardless of training, rather than investing that money in training."

That is indicative of the fact that our policymakers are not understanding the crisis. When I speak to groups like this, I usually say that the first crisis is that I am here. Why do you need to go to an elected official seven years out of office to have a discussion about workforce training in America? That, in and of itself, ought to be an indictment of what is going on in America today.

If that's the problem, let me give you the context with which we're dealing. We're going to deal with the Higher Education Act. We're going to deal with Head Start. We're going to deal with vocational education. We're going to see if there's some way to implement *No Child Left Behind*. And we're going to deal with reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act. In the 22 years I've been engaged in public policy, we have never had a better time to sit down and put together a comprehensive, coordinated response to investing in workforce training and preparation of Americans for now and the future. And it's not going to happen.

"When I speak to groups like this, I usually say that the first crisis is that I am here. Why do you need to go to an elected official seven years out of office to have a discussion about workforce training in America?"

It's not going to happen this year. Do we give up and go home? I say, no. What those of you in the business community need to do when you leave this town is to recognize that those of us who are engaged in workforce training from a public policy or association perspective are automatically assumed to be biased, with an agenda. Only the business community can make the case for what is happening in this country and what needs to happen in this country today.

This isn't a partisan issue, but if you have a Republican President, and you have a Republican Senate and a Republican House, and most of your state legislatures are run by Republicans and half your governors are Republicans, and the Republicans understand and listen to the business community, let me tell you, it's up to you.

I'll tell you what this crisis really means and it's this. Unless we get serious about giving the changing face of the American workforce the education, the training, the jobs, the income, and the quality of life that they need and deserve over the next ten to twenty years, I don't know how to go back home to rural Wisconsin and tell Grandma and Grandpa Olson that their Social Security won't be there. So if you think this is just a big-city issue for people of color, get it and get it real. Unless we solve this workforce issue, all America will be affected, because there is simply no way we will have the growth in the economy or we will have the contributions to the Social Security that my dad and everybody else so desperately needs in order to have the political and economic and cultural and social security that we need.

I really believe this. I think the homeland security issue is not terrorism in Wisconsin or in Texas. I don't think it's Iraq, and I don't think it's global competition. I think the homeland security issue in the next 20 years is whether we are going to give Americans skills and education and opportunity. ■

Guest Speakers

The Honorable Steve Gunderson

Steve Gunderson is a senior consultant and managing director of The Greystone Group, a Michigan-based strategic management and communications consulting firm. His areas of expertise include strategic planning, communications, and public policy. His current focus is youth development, education, and workforce investment. Previous Greystone Group clients include the Republican Main Street Partnership and the Mary Fisher AIDS Fund. He also had significant responsibility for the National 4-H Council's National Conversation on Youth Development in the 21st Century.

The Wisconsin native served 16 years in the U.S. Congress and three terms in the Wisconsin State Legislature. During his tenure, Gunderson was a recognized leader on agriculture, education, employment policy, health care, and human rights issues. Representing the largest dairy-production district in the nation, the Wisconsin native chaired the Livestock, Dairy and Poultry Subcommittee in the 104th Congress and led efforts to enact the most comprehensive reform of dairy policy in our nation's history.

Continuing his focus on preparing citizens and organizations for the 21st century global economy, Gunderson provides strategic planning and consulting for a variety of education organizations. His hallmark is his understanding of emerging American workforce challenges, speaking and consulting on these issues extensively. He has called the emerging collision of our nation's demographics and workforce skills "A Nation at Risk, Again," referencing the famous 1983 study that led to America's education reform efforts.

Tom Dowd

Tom Dowd is Deputy Assistant Secretary for the Employment and Training Administration, having previously been director of ETA's Business Relations Group. Mr. Dowd has also served as the Regional Administrator for ETA in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, where he was responsible for the oversight and guidance to the Mid-Atlantic states on workforce issues. He was also Regional Administrator in Denver, Colorado.

Mr. Dowd is a graduate of the University of New Mexico. He completed two years of Peace Corps Volunteer service in Sierra Leone, West Africa, and has also lived and worked in Denmark and Japan. He began his career in 1982 as a community economic developer with Futures for Children in Albuquerque.

Mr. Dowd has worked throughout his career to serve the needs of America's workforce as a Department of Labor employee and in the non-profit sector. He has extensive first-hand knowledge and experience with federal, state, and local employment and training programs through his work in ETA Regional Offices, at the Office of National Programs in Washington, DC, as a former Private Industry Council member, and with national non-profit corporations.

Jane Oates

Jane Oates is Senior Education Advisor to Senator Edward M. Kennedy on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee for higher education and workforce issues. Ms. Oates joined the staff during the 105th Congress and served on conference teams for the reauthorization of the Higher Education Act, the Carl Perkins Vocational Education Act, and the Workforce Investment Act. She continues to work on the implementation of these bills, as well as general issues in postsecondary education, job training, and national and community service.

In the 107th Congress, Ms. Oates was the lead staff on the Education Science Reform Act (the reauthorization of the Office of Educational Research and Improvement). During the 108th Congress, she will work on the reauthorizations of the Higher Education Act, the Workforce Investment Act, the Adult Literacy Act, and the Perkins Career and Technical Education Act.

Before joining Senator Kennedy's staff, Ms. Oates taught in the Boston and Philadelphia schools and was director of services to the field for the National Center for Education in the Inner Cities and the Mid-Atlantic Regional Educational Laboratory at Temple University.

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